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ABSTRACT

This is an annual report on violence in prime-time television. The tabulations, based on the monitoring of 13 weeks of programs on three networks, indicate that CBS was the lowest of the three networks in violence, though at the same level as the previous year. ABC remained the same level as last year, while NBC increased. Both the number of incidents and the rate of violence for all networks combined has increased since last season. The amount of violence in action programs decreased from 71% last season to 56% this season. A new measure, duration of violence, introduced to this year's study, indicates a substantial relationship between the total number of minutes devoted to violence and the number of incidents of violence. Data from this survey and from previous years are presented, and the appendices include definitions of terms used in the study. (DAG)

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NETWORK PRIME-TIME VIOLENCE TABULATIONS FOR 1976-77 SEASON

Joseph T. Klapper

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NETWORK PRIME-TIME VIOLENCE TABULATIONS FOR 1976-77 SEASON

Extent of Violence on CBS

The results of thirteen weeks of monitoring prime-time television show that, for the 1976-77 season, CBS was the lowest of the three networks in violence. As in the 1975-76 season, CBS is at its lowest level of violence since our monitoring activities began in the 1972-73 season.

CBS continues to have little violence in the pre-9:00 PM period; specifically, an average of three incidents of dramatic violence per week, or 10% of all incidents, occur in the family viewing period.

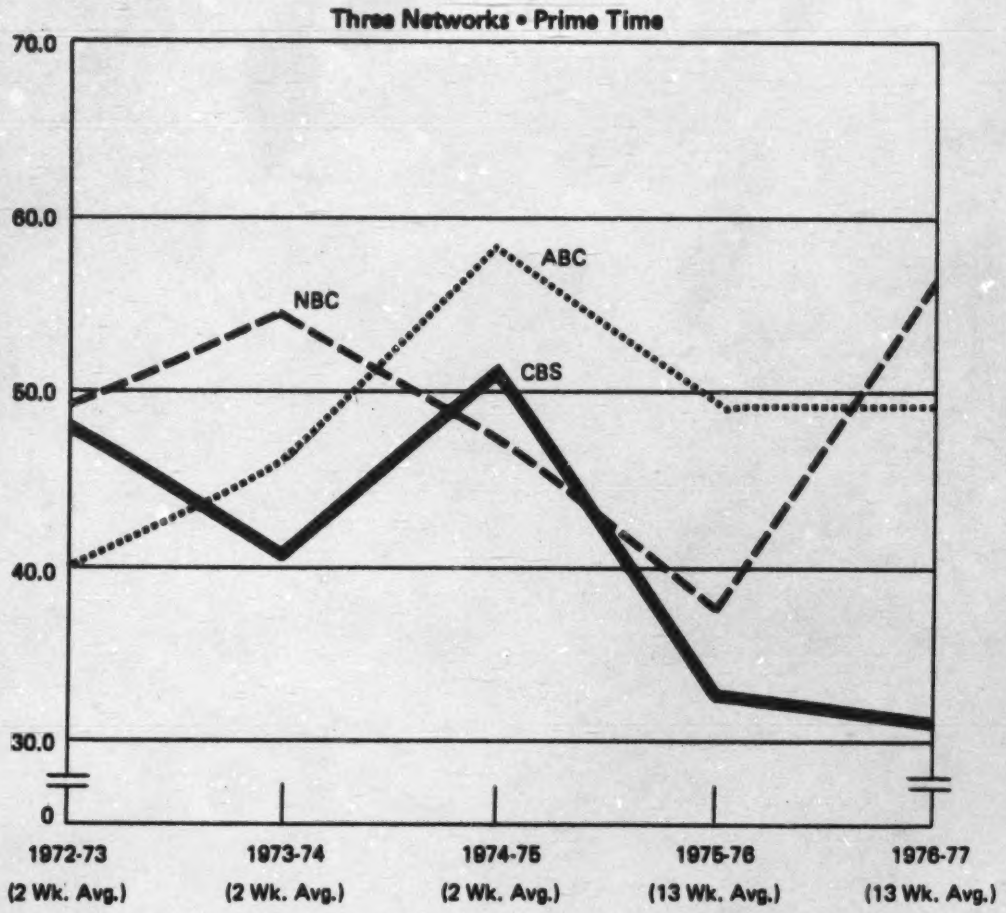
Violence was defined as follows: "the use of physical force against persons or animals, or the articulated, explicit threat of physical force to compel particular behavior on the part of a person."

As in the 1975-76 season, thirteen weeks of prime-time television (or half the season) were monitored in order to obtain a reliable measure that made allowance for week-to-week variation in the incidents of dramatic violence. (The specific weeks monitored are indicated in Appendix III.)

Comparison of the Three Networks

The following chart graphically depicts the change in violence level on each of the three networks since the 1972-73 season.

AVERAGE NUMBER OF INCIDENTS
OF DRAMATIC VIOLENCE PER WEEK



The violence tabulations for the 1976-77 season, covering 13 weeks of prime-time programming for each network, indicate that CBS and ABC have remained at essentially the same level as last year, while NBC has increased in violence from last season's averages (Table 1).

Of the three networks, CBS has the lowest rate of violence and is still at its lowest level of violence since these tabulations began in 1972.

As a result of the increase in violence on NBC, the combined three-network total has risen. In both number of incidents and rate of violence, the three-network total is higher than last season.*

The Question of Week-to-Week Variation

Both in 1975-76 and in this season, 13 weeks of programming were monitored for each network, providing considerable information on the extent of week-to-week variation.

In earlier tabulations, which included only two weeks of programming, an effort was made to select weeks that represented as little variation from regularly scheduled programming as possible. The decision was made in 1975 to expand the sample to a longer time interval that

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*There are some minor variations in the extent of change from prior years in rates per hour as compared to incidents of dramatic violence. These differences occur because rates are not affected by variations in the average number of hours of entertainment programming shown. (Election and other news events, as well as sports and documentary programming, are excluded from this analysis of entertainment programming.)

would more closely approximate the true average incidence of dramatic violence in prime-time programming. This was done because in recent years, television prime-time programming has become less constant, as "specials" have become more frequent and program changes more rapid.

This season in particular was characterized by frequent changes in scheduled program series and numerous "specials." Replacements were made throughout the season and such unusual practices as the preemption of an entire week's programming for a special series (Roots) also occurred. Additionally, some scheduled programming (such as NBC's Big Event) included a variety of programs under one rubric. Thus, it is even more difficult than in previous years to define a "typical" week in this year's season.

Another source of week-to-week variation derived from differences in the nature of the films shown. Each of the networks had some weeks in which films with little or no violence were shown; conversely, each of the networks had at least one week characterized by more violent film content.

"Action" programs were more stable in rate of violence (averaging between 3-5 violent incidents per hour) but even here there was some week-to-week variation. In addition, in some weeks preemptions have resulted in the showing of fewer "action" programs than were scheduled.

Because of all these factors, the week-to-week variation in the extent of dramatic violence becomes quite large, as shown in

Table 3. For each of the networks, one or more individual weeks varied considerably from the overall 13-week average. On each network, there was at least one week that had more than double the violence of the lowest week. If only one or two weeks had been selected to represent this season, the outcomes might have been considerably higher or lower than those obtained. The expansion of the number of weeks monitored results in a much more realistic appraisal of the amount of violence on prime-time network programs.*

Pre- and Post-9:00 PM Violence

CBS still has very little violence in the family viewing period. Specifically, there is an average of three incidents of dramatic violence per week before 9:00 PM on CBS, constituting 10% of the total violence on the network. Most of the pre-9:00 PM violence this season has occurred on NBC and ABC, which have averaged 14 and 11 incidents per week, respectively, in this time period.

For the three networks combined, the extent of violence in the pre-9:00 PM family viewing period has increased from last season, though it still is lower than in previous years we have monitored. In the 1976-77 season the average number of incidents of dramatic violence in the family viewing period for the three networks combined was 28 per week, as compared to 14 in the 1975-76 season.

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*Standard deviations of the mean number of incidents (a statistical measure of dispersion or variation from the average) were 7.89, 13.50, and 11.33 for CBS, NBC, and ABC, respectively. Means are shown in Table 1.

The proportion of all dramatic violence that occurred during the family viewing period has also increased over last season. In the current season, about one-fifth (21%) of all dramatic violence occurred in the pre-9:00 period. This is less than the proportion of violence that would occur pre-9:00 if programs involving dramatic violence were evenly distributed over the prime-time period, but it is higher than last season. Only 11% of dramatic violence occurred in the pre-9:00 PM period in the 1975-76 season.

Changes in Amount of Violence in Program Types

In general, a major share of the dramatic violence that occurs in prime-time entertainment programming consists of incidents in regularly scheduled "action" programs. However, action programming this season accounted for less than its usual share of total violence. Only slightly more than half (56%) of the incidents of dramatic violence noted occurred in "action" programs (crime, mystery, adventure series) as compared to 71% in the 1975-76 season (see Table 6).

This season was notable for the development of several non-action dramatic series, such as dramatizations of popular novels, which included some violence in their story lines. While the number of incidents of violence in "action" programs on the three networks

combined declined, the number of incidents in other programming showed a marked increase.*

The amount of violence accounted for by made-for-TV and feature films also showed an increase, despite the fact that there was no increase in the amount of time devoted to films on the three networks.

For each network, the average number of hours of "action" programming tabulated has been less than the number of scheduled "action" hours. This is to be expected in a sample carried over many weeks, since the regularly scheduled "action" programs are occasionally replaced by specials and other preemptions.

With regard to the rate of violent incidents on "action" programs, CBS and ABC have stayed at the same level as last year while NBC "action" programs have shown an increase. Each network averaged about four violent incidents per hour of "action" programming this season (Table 7).

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*In this season's tabulations, episodes of dramatic violence that occur in situation comedies were included in the totals for the "other programs" category. Increasingly, several situation comedies have dealt with serious topics or crimes such as muggings, robbery, etc. In previous years, such incidents rarely occurred (last season, for example, there were fewer than one per week on all three networks combined) and were not included. While the number of such incidents is still negligible (averaging three a week for all three networks combined), it was decided to include such incidents on the assumption that this trend may continue or accelerate. We continue to exclude comic violence from our overall count.

Duration of Violent Incidents

As an additional indicator of the extent of violence, the duration of violent incidents was introduced as a supplementary measure in this season's monitoring.

As would be expected, there is a substantial relationship between the total number of minutes devoted to violence and the number of incidents of violence, but there is some variation among program types (see Table 8). Violent incidents in film material tend to run longer, averaging close to two minutes in length; incidents of violence in action programs average slightly over a minute and the occasional episodes of dramatic violence in other types of programming usually run slightly less than a minute.

Table 1

Changes in Prime-Time Dramatic Violence

	Average number of incidents of dramatic violence per week	Average number of hours per week	Average rate of violent incidents per hour	% Change from prior year in number of incidents	% Change from prior year in rate per hour
CBS					
1972-73 (2-week average)	48	20.5	2.3		
1973-74 (" ")	40.5	21	1.9	- 16%	- 17%
1974-75 (" ")	51	21	2.4	+ 26	+ 26
1975-76 (13-week average)	32.5	21.3	1.53	- 36	- 38
1976-77 (13-week average)	31.0	19.7	1.57	- 5	+ 3
NBC					
1972-73 (2-week average)	49.5	20	2.5		
1973-74 (" ")	54.5	20.9	2.6	+ 10%	+ 4%
1974-75 (" ")	47.5	21.2	2.2	- 13	- 15
1975-76 (13-week average)	37.9	20.5	1.85	- 20	- 18
1976-77 (13-week average)	55.9	20.2	2.77	+ 47	+ 50
ABC					
1972-73 (2-week average)	40.5	19.5	2.1		
1973-74 (" ")	46	20	2.3	+ 14%	+ 10%
1974-75 (" ")	58.5	20.1	2.9	+ 27	+ 26
1975-76 (13-week average)	49.5	20.2	2.45	- 15	- 17
1976-77 (13-week average)	49.3	19.4	2.54	0	+ 4
Three-Network Total					
1975-76 (13-week average)	119.9	62.0	1.93		
1976-77 (13-week average)	136.2	59.3	2.30	+ 14%	+ 19%

Table 2

Extent of Dramatic Violence on Prime-Time Entertainment Television

13-Week Sample - 1976-1977

	Average number of incidents of dramatic violence per week	Average number of hours per week	Average rate per hour
CBS			
"Action" programs*	20.2	5.3	3.8
Other programs**	3.0	11.5	.3
Made-for-TV and feature films	7.8	2.9	2.7
Total	31.0	19.7	1.57
NBC			
"Action" programs*	28.9	7.0	4.1
Other programs**	11.7	8.0	1.5
Made-for-TV and feature films	15.3	5.2	2.9
Total	55.9	20.2	2.77
ABC			
"Action" programs*	27.2	6.4	4.3
Other programs**	7.1	9.0	.8
Made-for-TV and feature films	15.0	4.0	3.8
Total	49.3	19.4	2.54

*Regularly scheduled crime, mystery, western programs.
**General drama, comedy, variety -- both regularly scheduled and special.

Table 3

Range of Week-to-Week Variation in Dramatic Violence

13-Week Sample - 1976-1977

	Range in number of incidents of dramatic violence	Range in number of hours	Range in average rate per hour
CBS			
"Action" programs*	9-34	3-8	2.3-6.8
Other programs**	0-7	10-14.5	0-.7
Made-for-TV and feature films	0-19	0-5.5	0-6
Weekly Totals***	15-46	16-21.5	.9-2.4
NBC			
"Action" programs*	8-45	1.5-10	2.7-5.5
Other programs**	0-36	3.5-14.5	0-3.0
Made-for-TV and feature films	1-38	2-9.5	.4-5.6
Weekly Totals***	36-81	14.5-22.8	1.7-3.6
ABC			
"Action" programs*	15-48	2.5-8	3.4-6.0
Other programs**	1-22	4-16	.2-1.4
Made-for-TV and feature films	0-29	0-7	0-6.6
Weekly Totals***	24-69	12.5-22	1.7-3.6

*Regularly scheduled crime, mystery, western programs.
**General drama, comedy, variety--both regularly scheduled and special.
***Minimum and maximum range for weekly totals, including all three program categories.

Table 4

Incidents of Dramatic Violence

Before and After 9:00 PM EST

(All Three Networks Combined)

	Average Number of Incidents Per Week Before 9:00 PM, EST	Average Number of Incidents Per Week After 9:00 PM, EST
1972-73 (2-week average)	44	94
1973-74 (" ")	46	95
1974-75 (" "	35	122
1975-76 (13-week average)	14	106
1976-77 (" ")	28	108

Table 5

Incidents of Dramatic Violence

Before and After 9:00 PM EST

(By Network - 1976-77 Season)

	Average Number of Incidents Per Week Before 9:00 PM, EST	Average Number of Incidents Per Week After 9:00 PM, EST
CBS	3	28
NBC	14	42
ABC	11	38

Table 6

Variations in Dramatic Violence
in Program Types, 1975-76 & 1976-77

	Average number of incidents of dramatic violence per week	Average number of hours per week	Average rate per hour
All Three Networks Combined - 1975-76 Season			
"Action" programs*	85.7	22.3	3.8
Other programs**	6.6	27.7	.2
Made-for-TV and feature films	27.6	11.8	2.3
Total***	119.9	62.0	1.93
All Three Networks Combined - 1976-77 Season			
"Action" programs*	76.3	18.7	4.1
Other programs**	21.8	28.5	.8
Made-for-TV and feature films	38.1	12.1	3.2
Total	136.2	59.3	2.30

*Regularly scheduled crime, mystery, western programs.
**General drama, comedy, variety--both regularly scheduled and special.
***Minor differences between final totals and sum of figures due to rounding.

Table 7

Changes in Rate Per Hour of Dramatic Violence on Regularly-Scheduled "Action" Programs

	Number of hours of regularly-scheduled "action" programs*	Rate per hour of dramatic violence
CBS		
1972-73 (2-week average)	5.5	5.1
1973-74 (" ")	7.2	3.8
1974-75 (" ")	7.5	4.8
1975-76 (13-week average)	6.6	3.7
1976-77 (13-week average)	5.3	3.8
NBC		
1972-73 (2-week average)	7.2	5.1
1973-74 (" ")	7.8	3.7
1974-75 (" ")	7.5	3.6
1975-76 (13-week average)	7.5	3.3
1976-77 (13-week average)	7.0	4.1
ABC		
1972-73 (2-week average)	6.0	4.7
1973-74 (" ")	6.8	5.2
1974-75 (" ")	9.0	3.9
1975-76 (13-week average)	8.2	4.4
1976-77 (13-week average)	6.4	4.3

*This is the average number of hours of "action" programming (excluding films) observed during the sample weeks, which may not equal the number of hours of such programming normally scheduled, because of preemptions.

Table 8

Duration of Violent Incidents
13-Week Sample - 1976-77

(All Three Networks Combined)

	Average duration in minutes per week	Average number of incidents per week	Average duration of incidents in minutes
"Action" programs	97.5	76.3	1.3
Other programs	19.4	21.8	.9
Made-for-TV and feature films	67.3	38.1	1.8
Total	184.2	136.2	1.4

TECHNICAL APPENDICES

I. Analysis of Violence in Prime-Time Programming

Prior to 1975 - 76, the Office of Social Research monitored two sample weeks of prime-time television a year. One of the two sample weeks was monitored in the fall and the other after February 1, in order to take account of any midseason program changes. The sample weeks were chosen to reflect, as closely as possible, the normal prime-time schedule. Weeks containing no or few "specials" were favored over weeks containing several specials.

For the 1975-76 season and 1976-77 season, thirteen weeks, or half of each season, were included in the sample to reflect more adequately the total range of programming.

Monitoring during the sample weeks covered all regular-series programming and such entertainment specials as were scheduled, as well as theatrical features and made-for-television films. News, documentaries and sports were excluded.

Definition of Violence

Violence was defined for the monitoring as follows:

> "the use of physical force against persons or animals, or the articulated, explicit threat of physical force to compel particular behavior on the part of a person."

The implementation of the definition included accidents or acts of nature which occurred in a violent context as, for example, a person

being killed in an automobile accident while escaping from a crime. Further, all acts intended to cause physical harm (for example, attempted murder) were included, whether they were successful or not.

Violence was counted in terms of incidents. An incident is not absolutely synonymous with an "act." One "incident" might include brief breaks in the action, as in a protracted chase scene, interrupted by pauses for regrouping and reloading or acts of violence by more than one person, as, for example, in a fight scene involving several people.

Unintentional injuries (such as might result from a shove merely intended to get someone out of one's way) were not considered violent, nor were threats that were not backed up by a show of force (along the lines of "I'll get you some day").

A separate count was made of comic violence (e.g., the proverbial slapstick scene of hitting someone with a custard pie). Incidents of comic violence were few and are not included in the total counts of dramatic violence shown here.

Further details regarding the counting procedure will be found in the appended "Definitions and Guidelines as Furnished to Coders."

II. Definitions and Guidelines, as Furnished to Coders

Definition of Violent Incident

One sustained, dramatically continuous event involving violence, with essentially the same group of participants and with no major interruptions in continuity.

Duration of a Violent Incident

A violent incident begins with either the violent act itself or with a threat of violence (as defined below). For example, if a policeman shouts "Stop, or I'll shoot," and then shoots at the person fleeing, the incident would be counted as beginning with the initial shout.

Categories of Violence

Physical. The use of physical force against persons or animals, whether or not it is successful. For example, if a person shoots at another person and misses, this is still an act of violence. Also included are accidents or acts of nature in a violent context - for example, if a person is killed in an auto accident while escaping from the scene of a crime or the villain of the play is struck by lightning.

Threats of physical force. The articulated, explicit threat of physical force used as compulsion so as to create in the person threatened the fear of bodily harm if he did not comply. However, if threat is accompanied by or immediately followed by physical injury, it will not be counted separately. Do not include those physical actions which are not intended to and apparently do not produce bodily harm (e.g., a shove intended only to get someone out of one's way).

Results of Violence*

There are two categories of results:

(1) Lethal injury (death). Note that if a person is shot and falls down, he cannot be assumed to be dead unless it is clearly indicated. Often it is only later in the

*These "results of violence" data are not included in this report.

program that someone says that the person involved is dead, in the hospital, etc.

(2) Injury. This includes every infliction of pain from a single blow to a gunshot wound.

Comic Violence

An incident of "comic" violence is one in which the violence is in a context which would ordinarily produce laughter and the violence is not of a serious character.

III. Dates of Monitoring

The following are the thirteen weeks in which prime time television programs on all three networks were monitored:

September 20 - 26, 1976

October 4 - 10, 1976

October 18 - 24, 1976

November 1 - 7, 1976

November 15 - 21, 1976

November 29 - December 5, 1976

December 13 - 19, 1976

December 27 - January 2, 1977

January 10 - 16, 1977

January 24 - 30, 1977

February 7 - 13, 1977

February 21 - 27, 1977

March 7 - 13, 1977

IV. Statistical Notes

The unit of sampling for this study was a week of television programming. From the 26 weeks available for study, a systematic sample of 13 weeks was selected. In each of the selected weeks, all network television programs were analyzed for incidents of dramatic violence according to the specifications in the preceding section.

The following statistical procedures can be applied either to the total output, to the output of one network, or to the output for any particular type of programs.

Incidents per Week

Let X_i be the number of incidents in the i^{th} sample week. Let n be the number of weeks in the sample -- 13 in this case. Let N be the size of the universe -- 26 in this case. Then $\bar{X} = \Sigma X_i/n$ is the average weekly number of incidents.

$$\sigma_x^2 = 1 - \frac{n}{N} \quad \frac{\Sigma X^2 i}{n} - \bar{X}^2$$

$$\sigma_{\bar{x}}^2 = \sigma^2 x/n$$

$$\sigma_{\bar{x}} = \sqrt{\sigma_{\bar{x}}^2}$$ is the standard error of the mean

Average Weekly Rate Per Hour

Let Y_i be the number of hours monitored in the i^{th} sample week.

Then $R_i = Xi/Yi$ is the rate per hour in the i^{th} sampled week.

$$\bar{R} = \Sigma Ri/n$$ is the average weekly rate per hour

$$\sigma^2_R = (1 - \frac{n}{N}) \left(\frac{\Sigma Ri^2}{n} - \bar{R}^2 \right)$$

$$\sigma^2_{\bar{R}} = \sigma^2_R/n$$

$$\sigma_R = \sqrt{\sigma^2_{\bar{R}}}$$ is the standard error of the mean

To Compare Two Averages

Let $\bar{X}_A$ be the first mean (e.g., one network, one type of program, one year)

Let $\bar{X}_B$ be the other mean independently measured.

Then $$t = (\bar{X}_A - \bar{X}_B) \Big/ \sqrt{\sigma^2_{\bar{x}A} + -\sigma^2_{\bar{x}B}}$$

is "Student's" t, to be looked up in the table of the distribution of t with $(n_A - 1) + (n_B - 1)$ degrees of freedom. In this case, degrees of freedom equal 24.